

February 09, 2006- Rep. Rahall: Security of Rural America Hit Hard By Budget Proposal

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WASHINGTON, DC - U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall (D-WV) called the Administration's proposed budget "a hard hit at the security of rural America" and promised to fight against these cuts that pose a threat to continued security in the Mountain State.

"Securing America from within is a strong compliment to fighting our enemies abroad. America has led the world by example, giving its citizens the opportunities to compete by strengthening our infrastructure while reinforcing our military and securing our borders. The two agendas-economic security at home and safety from threats from abroad-go hand in hand. That is why I am so concerned about what this budget means for our citizens here at home," said Rahall.

The Presidents budget proposes elimination of Community Connect (broadband) grants, which help bring broadband to rural areas of the country.

"If we want to cultivate the Third, we must connect the Third," Rahall said. "How can we as a Nation be secure if our citizens do not have access to what is quickly becoming a basic necessity in our fast-paced economy? An elimination of broadband grants says to me, and probably many others, that this budget would not keep us on the path of delivering broadband to every American."

The regional Office of Economic Opportunity program also could be significantly reduced (roughly half of the nation's 1,100 OEO offices might close) as a result of attempts once again to eliminate the \$630 million federal program. These offices are important, particularly in rural states, in helping low-income residents find affordable housing, heating assistance and more.

In addition, the proposal includes an \$89 million reduction in rural economic development grants which are instrumental in helping deliver essential infrastructure and infrastructure improvement to WV communities.

"The stronger our economy, the more sturdy our infrastructure, the better positioned we as Americans will be in securing ourselves from threats posed to us," said Rahall.

Two other major cuts called for by the proposed budget would deal a significant blow to protecting West Virginia's water quality and providing safe recreational opportunities. The Clean Water State Revolving Fund, which provides federal

investment in a wide variety of water quality infrastructure projects, would be cut by \$199 million in the next year alone. In addition, the Land and Water Conservation Fund, run by the National Park Service and used by communities to acquire and develop public outdoor recreation areas, would be terminated completely by the proposed budget.

"My support for these programs-and my opposition to cutting them-is based on my desire to promote an excellent quality of life for West Virginians, pure and simple. Our communities depend upon these programs to provide clean water and safe and accessible recreational opportunities for our citizens."

Other United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) cuts include:

* A 50 percent cut to the Resource Conservation and Development Program which funds the local RC & D Councils throughout West Virginia which play a vital role in rural development and natural resource conservation in southern West Virginia.

* The elimination of all funding for Farmland Protection which many West Virginia counties, especially in the eastern half of WV, are utilizing to help to put farmland under protection from future development.

* A \$75 million cut from important USDA watershed protection and flood prevention operations and budget and a \$196 million cut from important Research and Extension Grant Programs which will have an adverse effect on our nation's vital Land Grant University System.

The National Farmers Union is urging Congress to reject President Bush's cuts in agricultural spending.

"I think it is wrong for President Bush to try to balance the budget on the backs of rural Americans," said NFU President Dave Frederickson. "Agricultural programs are not the cause of the record federal deficit and, therefore, should not be the solution."

Rahall agrees and hopes Congress will reject the President's proposals.

"It makes no sense to me why the Administration is determined to cut programs that play such a major role in the safety and development of rural America," Rahall said. "RC&D councils, our farmers and land-grant institutions would suffer under this budget. I don't believe the best way to secure America is to hamper opportunities for success from within."

In addition to the USDA cuts, the Administration is proposing deep cuts to rural housing programs. The budget proposes the complete elimination of the Community Services Block Grant program, which has helped community action agencies

that have been fighting poverty for more than 30 years.

Notably, the proposed budget would raise nearly \$6 billion in revenue by mandating higher taxes on airline passengers and increased co-pay and enrollment fees on our nation's veterans.

"Raising taxes on America's veterans and traveling public while cutting depended-upon programs important to rural America-all under the guise of a compassionate budget-just doesn't add up. It's time for all of us, from both sides of the aisle, to recognize this budget for what it is - a proposal of misplaced priorities that falls squarely on the shoulders of West Virginians and other hardworking Americans."